DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 196 PS 012 566

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TITLE Policymaking Styles in State Early Childhood Education.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Altruism; Comparative Analysis; Day Care; Differences; *Early Childhood Education; *Institutional Characteristics; *Organizational Climate; Organizations (Groups); *Policy Formation; *Realism; State Agencies
IDENTIFIERS California; Michigan; New York; Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study, 84 major state level early childhood policymakers in Michigan, California and New York were surveyed to identify differences in policymaking styles among state agencies and interest groups. Participants included (1) agency policymakers, such as early childhood specialists in the departments of education, social services, and public health, (2) government personnel concerned with prekindergarten policy issues, and (3) prekindergarten specialists. Respondents rated the agencies and groups on a five point scale measuring altruism/realism. Results indicate that on the whole in all three states the state agencies for education, social services, and public health were perceived as somewhat more realistic in style than were the interest groups such as the state affiliate of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), private voluntary child care organizations, proprietary child care organizations, and Project Head Start. Except for proprietary groups, which by their nature are first concerned with factors affecting their livelihood, interest groups were seen as more idealistic in policymaking style than were state agencies. According to respondents, New York private child care organizations and California Head Start programs had a somewhat realistic style. In conclusion, implications of the findings for early childhood education policymaking are discussed and a strategy for effective political action is recommended. (Author/RH)

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ED211196

POLICYMAKING STYLES IN STATE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Policymaking styles of key state actors in the education of young children are examined. Respondents in three states, California, New York and Michigan were surveyed. People in state agencies were seen as realist while interest (excepting proprietary) groups generally were idealistic. The implications of these stylistic variations are then discussed.

Most organizations have characteristic tendencies, sentiments and prejudices. These stylistic features are major attributes of organizations and groups. This seems especially so for early childhood educational actors. Because they should play an increasingly central role in the state-level political process in the next decade or two, it is important to examine these policymaking styles.[1]

To guide these efforts, the relevant overriding features of pre-kindergarten state politics are contrasted with those of the kindergarten-twelfth grade (K-12) state policymaking process. First, K-12 politics is pervaded with what is called "material politics" or struggles over the distribution of tangible resources (Edelman, 1964). While early childhood politics has financial stakes, it is more clearly characterized by value cleavages such as whether day care should be primarily a custodial support to working mothers or a deliverer of an enriching developmental experience for the very small child. Or more commonly, cleavages occur over the types of philosophy emphasized (Ruopp, et al., 1979, 56-58). Secondly, K-12 state policymaking is heavily determined by the manifold activities of complex bureaucratic organizations. By contrast the prekindergarten policy area is still populated by numerous small scale, informal and often temporary yet idealistic interest groups. Of course, this picture may change drastically in the not too distant future with, for example, the growth of child-care franchising (Pierce, 1971, 162-163).

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[1] See more extensive treatment of relative actor influence and key issues in Bridgeland and Duane (1980).

[2] In 1977, the "National Consortium of Families and Children" (Bank Street College, Merrill-Palmer College and Pacific Oaks College) sponsored an examination of federally funded, state mediated programs for the young child. Three papers resulted from this (Duane and Bridgeland; unpublished; Garms, unpublished; and Kirst, unpublished).

As leaders in early childhood programming in their respective regions, three states: California, Michigan and New York were selected for investigation.[2] Knowledgeable persons of the state early child educational policymaking process acted as respondents in each state. Three respondents were discovered through several stages by the reputational method. Each person was asked to identify and rank the major participants (public agency, private group or interested individuals) in state early childhood policymaking. As to specific techniques, a structured questionnaire, with some complementary semi-structured items were mailed to the respondents in early 1978.

Within each of the three states (California, Michigan and New York), respondent panels were constructed of three broad categories of people:

1. Agency Policy People, including the early childhood specialists in the departments of education, social services and public health.

2. Non-Agency Policy People, such as the governor's education aides and key legislators or legislative aides concerned with pre-kindergarten policy issues.

3. Pre-Kindergarten Specialists, for example, the officials in state branches of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Council of Cooperative Nurseries spokespersons, early childhood specialists from the teachers or school board associations, academic pre-kindergarten authorities and the like.

There were a total of eighty-four respondents who completed and returned the questionnaire. These include: thirty-five for Michigan, twenty-seven for California and twenty-two for New York. Those findings which focus on the issue of policymaking style are especially illuminating and are reported below.

RESULTS

For purposes of statistical analysis the technique called "homogeneity of attitude" is employed here. Where the perceptions differ significantly, the hypotheses of homogeneity can then be rejected. Clearly, in the present effort, the policymaking styles of the various actors and agencies were seen as different by these respondents.[3]

The Policymaking Styles of State Agencies

On the whole, the state agencies were perceived as somewhat more realistic in style than were the interest groups. This was apparently the case in all three states for all three of the child effecting departments (education,

(TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE)

social services and public health -- see Table One). A plurality of respondents chose the third point (on a five point scale) from altruistic to realistic for the departments of public health in all three states. This was also true for the departments of education in Michigan and New York. One (pre-kindergarten specialist) respondent said "the education department is both very realistic and idealistic." On the other hand, this agency was generally perceived as somewhat more on the realistic side in California. Overall the departments of social services were perceived as toward the realistic side when twenty-seven of the respondents identify place four on the continuum as opposed to twenty-three choosing place three.

An examination of average scores demonstrates that with the possible exception of the Michigan department of education, "realism" was a basic departmental policymaking style to our respondents (Table One). Beyond this,

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[3] There were of course, other groups (e.g., 4C--Community Coordinated Child Care, or the Department of Mental Health) included as possible options. These groups elicited very little response from our informants.

these statistics show a noteworthy consistency of realistic assessments for all the various departments of social services and to a lesser extent public health, in the three states.[4] This realistic social-services style seems especially to complement a common opinion of these public officials. "They are more interested in organizational efficiency rather than the education of the 'whole child'." Nonetheless, as one California pre-kindergarten specialist stated while rating the departments as moving from their former altruism to realism, "some agency people are still at 'one'." And another California (non-agency policy) person suggested that "most groups in our state are both," yet she assessed all the agencies as highly realistic (at a five).

In the introduction to the questionnaire, we characterized, the extremes as "'fuzzy' headed altruistic idealists vs. hard-headed pragmatic realists." The actual labels on the question were "altruists" and "realists". One respondent preferred the term "idealists" to "altruists" and perhaps for many respondents that was clearer. One Michigan agency person asked "whose reality?" No other respondent seemed to have difficulty with this, however. Another New York agency person said all agencies are "too decentralized and complex for this dichotomy," so she chose "no opinion."

Notwithstanding some possible conceptual difficulties, it appears that among our respondents, at least for state agencies, there is agreement or homogeneity of response (x^2 0.01 (8) = 20.090). It would seem that the "realistic" style is thus, applicable generally to state agency groups.

The Policymaking Styles of Early Childhood Interest Groups

There is a good deal more discrepancy seen between the various specialists

[4] In California there are no separate departments of public health and social services, but one large health department covering all these services. Many resoondents pointed this out, but answer for the various services as if for two different departments.

and interest groups involved in child education causes (Table Two-x^2 0.01 (12) = 26.212) than there is among the state agencies (Table One). The

(TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE)

discrepancy is highlighted in the summarizing statistic which includes variations in overall mean between interest groups. Specifically, the averages range from the rather high or realistic style (3.6) of proprietary child-care organizations (there are 28.6% at the fourth point) to the relatively low (2.5) of the more idealistic state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC-47% at the first or second points).

The interest groups should be seen as the idealists. They were except for the proprietary, who may be idealistically constrained by profit-loss considerations. Moreover, proprietary groups "tend to react to crisis situations but are usually well-informed and realistic." This was according to a Michigan pre-kindergarten specialist.

All other pre-kindergarten interest groups "tilted" generally much more toward the idealistic side according to our respondents (at least overall). There were some interesting variations between the states and groups. New York private child-care organizations had a somewhat realistic style according to our respondents (a mean of 3.4), as did head start in California (3.3). There does not seem to be anything in the data to account for these realistic styles, except perhaps in the case of New York with its rather well developed system of licensing procedures (Garms, 1977). Californian head start may have become more like their K-12 counterparts, that is a "realistic style." But why this should be so in California and much less so elsewhere is unclear.

In summary, policymaking styles vary between agencies and interest groups, with the former more realistic (Table One) and the latter more idealistic (Table Two). These perceptual differences between state agencies (Table One) and child-oriented groups (Table Two) are significant (x^2 = 22.139, where x^2 0.01 (4) = 13.277). Within the interest groups however, proprietary groups tended to be seen as realistic as any of the state departments.

CONCLUSION

As one Michigan agency person stated, "policy-making styles more frequently reflect the measure of freedom to operate a group feels it has then a selected predisposition to act in a selected manner." State agencies are political entities. They must be responsive to their publics, the legislature, the governor's office of budget and management and their own bureaucratic needs of expansion in program development areas. This is particularly so when this latter relates to the capture of funds or the commitment of captured funds. They can only be idealist if it corresponds to these other needs. Proprietary groups, by their very nature are first concerned with those factors which affect their livelihood. Their reality is a "profit and loss statement," comparable to the material politics characteristic of the K-12 state policy-making process.

Nonpolitically affiliated associations like the local or state branch of the NAEYC, etc. have more "freedom" to be idealistic. Their existence is predicated on the desire of their membership to "improve programs for young children". The more idealistic they are, the greater their appeal to their membership. And to date, material goals have not motivated much early child-

hood voluntarism, at least not the same extent the "children's cause" has.

Everyone wants the best for young children. However, the "best" for some groups exceed the costs they are willing to pay for or feel thay can pay for. Contrarily, the "best" for other means the "developmental best" for the young child. Therefore, at this time a coherent and common style in state level politics of early childhood education has not emerged.

But building a common course for action seems especially imperative in these budget-slashing times. If young-child oriented groups want to exert influence on relevant state policies, it would seem imperative to adopt an appropriate stance. Therefore, we suggest a three-fold strategy. First, for many policy decisions, a single organization such as the 4c's or even the local branch of the NAEYC with a narrow focus (for example, day care or child abuse) should be the most successful. Secondly, for those issues involving either major policy innovations, e.g., the 1975 Amendment to the Social Security Act (Title XX, Grants to States for Services), or threats of sweeping reductions in ongoing programs, e.g., California's Proposition (1978), a broad-based political and financial effort may be indispensable to moving the system. Public-membership drives or money-raising campaigns are appropriate here. Finally, there may be real collaboration possible at a more intermediate level among a limited number of distinct and yet substantively close organizations. After all the proprietary "Kindercare" and the voluntary NAEYC act for young children. These suggestions don't guarantee success, but they should improve the chances for even the "fuzzy-headed altruistic idealists" in the "hard-headed" world of state policy-making.

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TABLE ONE
POLICY-MAKING STYLES OF STATE AGENCIES*

		ALTRUISTIC			REALISTIC	
		1	2	3	4	5
	$\bar{x}$	%	%	%	%	%
1. Department of Education						
a. Michigan	2.9	08.5	20.0	40.0	17.1	05.7
b. California	3.4	03.7	18.5	22.2	29.6	14.8
c. New York	3.4	04.5	09.1	40.9	22.7	13.6
d. Total	3.2	06.0	16.7	34.5	22.6	10.7
2. Department of Social Service						
a. Michigan	3.6	00.0	08.5	28.5	37.1	14.3
b. California	3.7	03.7	07.5	22.2	25.9	22.2
c. New York	3.7	00.0	04.5	31.8	31.8	18.2
d. Total	3.7	01.2	07.1	27.4	32.1	17.9
3. Department of Public Health						
a. Michigan	3.2	05.7	11.4	25.7	20.0	08.6
b. California	3.4	03.7	11.1	22.2	18.5	14.8
c. New York	3.0	04.5	18.2	22.7	18.2	04.5
d. Total	3.2	04.8	13.1	23.8	19.0	09.5

n = 84

$x^2 = 12.073$ (8 d.f.), non significant

*The rows of scores do not add to 100% because the "no opinions" are excluded for ease of analysis.

TABLE TWO
POLICY-MAKING STYLES OF INTEREST GROUPS*

		ALTRUISTIC			REALISTIC	
	$\bar{x}$	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
1. State Affiliage of NAEYC						
a. Michigan	2.6	11.4	31.4	05.7	22.8	00.0
b. California	2.5	18.5	29.6	25.9	11.1	03.7
c. New York	2.4	13.6	40.9	13.6	00.0	09.1
d. Total	2.5	14.3	33.3	14.3	13.1	03.6
2. Private Voluntary Child Care Organizations						
a. Michigan	2.9	08.5	28.5	17.1	22.9	05.7
b. California	2.3	22.2	29.6	18.5	07.4	03.7
c. New York	3.4	13.6	09.1	18.2	22.7	22.7
d. Total	2.8	14.3	23.8	17.9	17.9	09.5
3. Proprietary Child Care Organizations						
a. Michigan	3.8	00.0	05.7	20.0	31.4	17.1
b. California	3.1	07.4	07.4	33.3	22.2	03.7
c. New York	3.8	04.5	04.5	13.6	31.8	18.2
d. Total	3.6	03.6	06.0	22.6	28.6	13.1
4. Head Start						
a. Michigan	2.9	02.9	20.0	31.4	14.3	02.9
b. California	3.3	11.1	25.9	29.6	14.8	03.7
c. New York	2.4	18.2	31.8	18.2	09.1	04.5
d. Total	2.7	09.5	25.0	27.4	13.1	03.6

All Interest Groups - $x^2 = 40.230$ (12 d.f.), Significant at 0.01 level

NAEYC vs. Proprietary Groups - $x^2 = 29.973$ (4 d.f.), Significant at 0.01 level

Private vs. Proprietary Groups - $x^2 = 16.999$ (4 d.f.), Significant at 0.01 level

* The "no opinions" are excluded. (N = 84)